

Agua Tibia

CA-060-002

AGUA TIBIA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-060-002)

1. THE STUDY AREA — 344 acres

The Agua Tibia WSA is located in southwestern Riverside County, ten miles west of Temecula, California. The WSA includes 344 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). There are no private or State lands within the WSA's boundaries (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA is located adjacent to the Agua Tibia Wilderness Area, a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) wilderness area, administered by the Cleveland National Forest. The WSA is bounded on the north, east and west by private land. The southern boundary is contiguous with the Agua Tibia Wilderness Area.

The WSA consists of an east-west trending ridge just north of the steep Agua Tibia Wilderness. As a small part of the Agua Tibia Mountain portion of the Peninsular Range geomorphic province, elevations in this area range from 1,700 feet in the northwest to a maximum of 2,581 feet. Dominant features include Pechanga Creek which traverses through the southwest corner of the WSA, and a steep break along the northern boundary overlooking the Pauba Valley.

The WSA was studied under Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). The WSA is within BLM's Escondido-Border Planning Unit, for which a management framework plan was completed in 1976. Two different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Western Counties Wilderness Study Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), completed in 1987: all wilderness and no wilderness.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE — 344 acres recommended for wilderness
0 BLM acres recommended for nonwilderness

All wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. This is considered to be environmentally preferable as it will result in the least change from the existing natural environment over the long term.

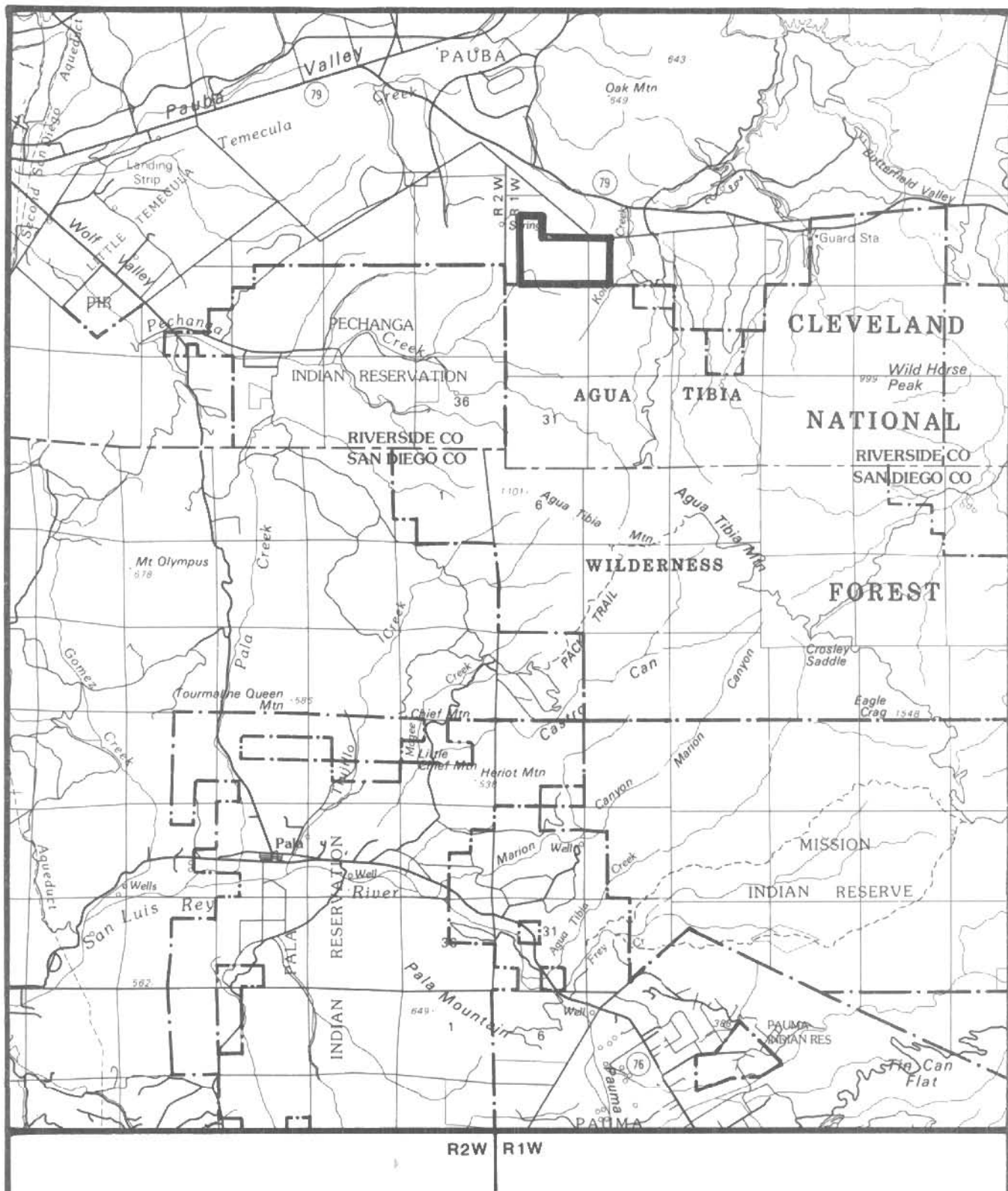
This WSA is recommended for wilderness designation because: (1) the area is in a nearly undisturbed natural state and possesses outstanding wilderness values; (2) it is a logical extension of the USFS's existing wilderness area, the Agua Tibia Wilderness; (3) designation will not adversely affect any existing resources or uses within the wilderness area; and (4) no significant conflicts with other resource uses will result from designation.

The area's wilderness values of naturalness, opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined types of recreation, are outstanding. Rugged terrain and limited access have maintained the area's pristine character. Within the WSA's boundaries, a sense of solitude is easily achieved. Dense

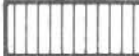
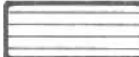

vegetation, topographic relief and few visitors ensure opportunities for seclusion. When evaluated in combination with the adjacent existing wilderness areas, the WSA contains outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation. Hiking and backpacking opportunities abound. The area contains representations of two native California plant communities. No routes of travel have been identified within the WSA.

The area is located adjacent to the northern border of the Agua Tibia Wilderness Area, administered by the Cleveland National Forest. This proximity enhances the WSA's values.

Current uses within this WSA consist of day hiking, picnicking, nature study, and to a lesser extent, hiking and backpacking at levels of less than 1000 visitor use days per year. These uses are consistent with those allowed under the proposed action. Designation will not affect these activities. In addition, designation of this WSA as wilderness would not result in any conflicts with other resources or uses. This WSA lacks any mineral potential. There is no access for motorized vehicles within this area.

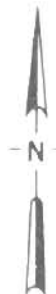


- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |
|  | NONE |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
|  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | STATE |
|  | PRIVATE |

**Agua Tibia
Proposal
MAP-1**

0 1 2 3
MILES



060-002
JUNE, 1988

TABLE 1 - Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area

| <u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u> | | <u>Acres</u> |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| BLM | (surface and subsurface) | 344 |
| Split Estate | (BLM surface only) | 0 |
| Inholdings | | |
| State | | 0 |
| Private | | 0 |
| Total | | 344 |
| <u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary</u> | | <u>Acres</u> |
| BLM | (within WSA) | 344 |
| BLM | (outside WSA) | 0 |
| Split Estate | (within WSA) | 0 |
| Split Estate | (outside WSA) | 0 |
| Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness | | 344 |
| Inholdings | | |
| State | | 0 |
| Private | | 0 |
| <u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u> | | <u>Acres</u> |
| BLM | (surface and subsurface) | 0 |
| Split Estate | (BLM surface only) | 0 |
| Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness | | 0 |

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: Limited access and extreme ruggedness have combined to ensure the maintenance of a pristine condition, and the imprint of man's presence is negligible. The area has outstanding natural values, and does not contain roads, ways, or prospects. The only evidence of man is a narrow foot trail that traverses the northern portion of the WSA. The natural character of the unit is outstanding when compared to nonwilderness study area lands to the north. From the crest and high elevations, outstanding views are

available of all major mountain ranges and peaks in southern California. Exceptional views of the San Bernardino, San Jacinto, San Gabriel, and Santa Ana Mountains are all available to recreationists.

2. Solitude: Opportunities for solitude within the area are excellent. Dense vegetation on the steep slopes and in the canyons combined with topographic relief and relatively low use levels ensure a sense of solitude throughout. This feeling is enhanced toward the south as one approaches the existing Agua Tibia Wilderness. Opportunities for solitude are reduced close to the northern border of the WSA, near which a cluster of homes is located.

This WSA is periodically overflowed by military aircraft as part of the national defense mission taking place in approved military operating areas and flight corridors. The visual intrusions and associated noise create periodic temporary effects on solitude which are deemed necessary and acceptable as a part of the defense preparedness of the nation.

3. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Although the site itself is small, when combined with the adjacent wilderness, the total area offers outstanding opportunities for unconfined types of recreation. The steep topography and untrammelled nature provide challenging hiking and backpacking experiences.
4. Special Features: The area provides excellent representations of two native California plant communities. The coastal sage scrub and chaparral communities present contain great diversity of species.

B. Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

1. Assessing the diversity of natural systems and features as represented by ecosystems: This WSA contains 344 acres of the California Chaparral/Coastal Sagebrush ecosystem. This study area joins and complements the existing 15,934-acre Agua Tibia Wilderness area to the south and offers a higher elevation extension of undisturbed chaparral.

Table 2 - Ecosystem Representation

| Bailey-Kuchler Classification Domain/Province/PNV | <u>NWPS Areas</u> | | <u>Other BLM Studies</u> | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| | <u>areas</u> | <u>acres</u> | <u>areas</u> | <u>acres</u> |
| <u>NATIONWIDE</u> | | | | |
| California Chaparral/Coastal Sagebrush | 2 | 49,849 | 1 | 5,002 |
| <u>CALIFORNIA</u> | | | | |
| California Chaparral/Coastal Sagebrush | 2 | 49,849 | 1 | 5,002 |

2. Expanding the opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation within a days driving time (five hours) of major population centers: The WSA is within a five-hour drive of eight major population centers. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population centers.

Table 3
Wilderness Opportunities for Residents
of Major Population Centers

| <u>Population Centers California</u> | <u>NWPS areas</u> | | <u>Other BLM Studies</u> | |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| | <u>areas</u> | <u>acres</u> | <u>areas</u> | <u>acres</u> |
| Anaheim-Santa Ana | 25 | 2,823,534 | 153 | 5,703,616 |
| Bakersfield | 32 | 4,071,358 | 128 | 3,998,548 |
| Los Angeles-Long Beach | 27 | 2,876,234 | 135 | 4,958,751 |
| Oxnard-Ventura | 23 | 2,195,198 | 85 | 2,703,260 |
| Riverside-San Bernardino | 22 | 2,031,054 | 205 | 7,658,649 |
| Santa Barbara-Santa Maria-Lompoc | 20 | 1,166,142 | 35 | 528,590 |
| San Diego | 15 | 1,043,680 | 100 | 3,378,814 |
| Visalia-Tulare-Porterville | 34 | 4,431,635 | 61 | 1,681,921 |

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: The WSA is within 50 air miles of four BLM WSAs recommended for wilderness designation. Agua Tibia WSA is adjacent to the Agua Tibia Wilderness Area, administered by the USFS. Also within a 50 mile radius are the following designated wilderness areas: Santa Rosa, San Jacinto, and San Geronio Wilderness Areas, administered by the San Bernardino National Forest; San Mateo Canyon Wilderness Area, administered by Cleveland National Forest; and Mount San Jacinto and Anza Borrego Desert State Wilderness Areas.

C. Manageability

The Agua Tibia WSA is manageable as wilderness. There are no conflicts which would preclude management of this area as wilderness.

Military overflights in this WSA must be considered to maintain the integrity of the existing and future national defense mission as well as the wilderness resource.

D. Energy and Mineral Resource Values

1. Summary of Information Known at the Time of the Preliminary Suitability Recommendation: The Agua Tibia WSA was not inventoried for mineral resources under the BLM Geology-Energy-Mineral assessment process. Mineral resources were addressed, however, in the 1987 Final EIS for the Western Counties Wilderness Study Project. The EIS indicated no mineral resource potential for the WSA. A mineral survey of the USFS's Agua Tibia Wilderness Area, adjacent to the BLM WSA, was made by the U.S. Bureau of Mines (BOM) and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The findings of these surveys were published in the BOM in Open File Report (OFR) 11-85, and the USGS in USGS Bulletin 1319-A. Neither the BOM nor the USGS reports identified any potential for the occurrence of mineral resources within the USFS area.

Geologic conditions in the BLM WSA are the same that underlie the USFS wilderness area. The geology of the WSA was mapped as being an isolated block of intrusive gabbroic rock in high angle normal fault contact with adjoining Pleistocene nonmarine deposits on the west, north and east, and inferred contact with the granitic rocks to the south (Mann, J.F., Jr., 1955, Geology of a Portion of the Elsinore Fault Zone, California, California Div. of Mines Spec. Rpt. 43, 22p.). Geologic conditions in the WSA do not appear to support the occurrence of mineral resource potential.

2. Summary of Significant New Mineral Resource Data Collected Since the Preliminary Suitability Recommendation Which Should Be Considered in the Final Decision: Due to the low potential no mineral resource potential map was prepared. As of December 1987, there were no unpatented mining claims, mineral sales or leases recorded with BLM in this WSA.

E. Impacts on Resources

Table 4
Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

| <u>Issue Topics</u> | <u>All-Wilderness Alternative</u> | <u>No-Wilderness Alternative</u> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Impact on Wilderness Values | The net effect of the management actions would be the retention and long-term protection of the area's wilderness values resulting primarily from the continued closure of the area to ORV use. In addition, long-term security for unanticipated adverse future actions would be provided. Naturalness and solitude would be reduced by trail maintenance and increased visitor use on less than one percent of the WSA. The special features (scenic views and two native California plant communities) and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation would not be impacted more than negligibly. | Impacts under the No-Wilderness/No-Action Alternative would be essentially the same as those under the Proposed Action, except that there would not be long-term security from unanticipated future actions and there would be temporary (two to four years) negative impacts to naturalness and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation from the proposed prescribed burning on 100 acres every ten years. The prescribed burning would have temporary minor benefits to scenic views and moderate benefit to the coastal scrub and chaparral communities, which are fire dependent. |

F. Local Social and Economic Considerations

No local social or economic considerations were identified in the CDCA Plan and EIS. Therefore, no further discussion of this topic will occur in this document.

G. Summary of WSA - Specific Public Comments

The following is a summary of all comments received. Inaccuracies that are known to exist are noted in parentheses.

1. Inventory Phase: Most comments agreed with BLM's findings.
2. Draft Environmental Impact Statement: The Bureau's recommendation was that the Agua Tibia WSA be designated as suitable for wilderness. Of the seventeen letters commenting on the Agua Tibia WSA, fourteen favored and three opposed wilderness designation.

Wilderness proponents noted that features which would benefit from wilderness designation included the State-listed endangered Least Bell's vireo (no suitable habitat for this species in the WSA), the natural ecosystem, and solitude for nonmotorized recreationists. A few respondents wanted this small area transferred to the USFS to be managed as wilderness.

The California Department of Forestry noted that wilderness status affects fire defense and suppression. However, they had little concern about this particular WSA, since its fire protection would fall upon the USFS, which manages the adjacent wilderness area to the north. Two organizations opposed wilderness for this area because of its potential for mineral and geothermal resources. They wanted the area to be left open for exploration and development.

3. Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement: The Bureau's recommendation was the same as in the DEIS. All 344 acres were recommended as suitable. Forty-two responses were received, 28 from individuals, 11 from organizations, and the rest from local or Federal agencies or businesses. The Bureau's recommendation was supported by all but one of the respondents. The San Diego Association of Governments opposed wilderness because it would limit the use of certain fire prevention techniques.

Reasons for favoring wilderness designation included the following: (1) it would provide the best protection for endangered plants and animals (none found within this WSA); (2) successful wilderness management is compatible with effective fire prevention and protection; and (3) this area should be added to the adjacent USFS wilderness.